

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CHARLES E. GRASSLEY
Forum on the National Shortage of Geriatricians

May 20, 1998

I am pleased to open this morning's forum, which will address the importance of geriatric medicine and the shortage of geriatricians our nation faces. I want to thank both Senator Reid and Senator Reed for their interest in this issue and for requesting this forum today. It is especially timely that we are holding this forum today since the month of May is *Older Americans Month*. This year's theme is ***Living Longer, Growing Stronger in America***.

The old saying "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" really is true. Physicians trained in geriatrics can prevent many health problems in the elderly. We will hear from a woman this morning who was misdiagnosed and given the wrong medication by her primary care physician. It was not until she was seen by a geriatrician that her problem was correctly treated. We will also hear from experts in the field about the benefits of this training, especially as our population continues to age.

In light of the aging population and the impending retirement of the baby boomers, the need for geriatricians will be great. For example, in my home state of Iowa, 15 percent of the population is over 65. We have the third-largest percentage of elderly in the nation. Currently, Iowa has 87 geriatricians. According to the Institute of Medicine, Iowa will need 304 geriatricians by the year 2010, when the baby boomers retire. By 2030, that number increases to 472. Supply is certainly not keeping up with demand.

Panelists today will highlight why we have a shortage of geriatricians. They also will examine possible solutions to this problem and will allow time for audience questions. Our moderator will be the Department of Health and Human Services' Assistant Secretary for Aging, Jeannette Takamura. In addition, we have many distinguished speakers here today. I hope we can all learn something about this very important issue, and I appreciate the panelists' availability to participate in this forum.